HARVARD, MIT

Following Aaron Swartz's suicide, MIT network attacked three times

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By Katherine Landergan, Town Correspondent

In the weeks following Internet activist Aaron Swartz's suicide, the MIT campus network has been hacked several times, according to a statement on the MIT news office website.

The statement said that starting Jan. 13, two days after Swartz's death, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's online network "has experienced a series of outages that have temporarily affected a number of web services." The other attacks against the network took place on Jan. 18 and Jan. 28.

MIT's Information Services and Technology (IS&T) department has taken several steps to stop these attacks, such as installing filters, the statement said.

"We understand that it can be unsettling to have a number of outages and service interruptions in a short period of time," Christine C. Fitzgerald, manager of communications for IS&T, said in the statement. "The corrective and preventive measures that IS&T has put in place as a result of these outages have mitigated the risk of similar attacks or threats to the MIT network."

In July 2011, Swartz was charged in US District Court in Boston for hacking into the JSTOR archive system on MIT's network in 2010. He allegedly downloaded more than 4 million articles, some of which were behind a paywall.

The 26-year-old hanged himself in his Brooklyn apartment on Jan. 11, according to the New York Medical Examiner's Office and a statement from his family and partner.

The hacker collective Anonymous claimed responsibility for that first hack, in which several subdomains of the university's website had been turned into memorial pages for Swartz.

In a cached version of the hacked page, Anonymous wrote that "the government's prosecution of Swartz was a grotesque miscarriage of justice, a distorted and perverse shadow of the justice that Aaron died fighting for – freeing the publicly-funded scientific literature from a publishing system that makes it inaccessible to most of those who paid for it."

At the bottom of the page, Anonymous apologized to MIT for hacking into their website, and says they do not blame MIT for Swartz's death.

"We do not consign blame or responsibility upon MIT for what has happened," they wrote. "But call for all those feel heavy-hearted in their proximity to this awful loss to acknowledge instead the responsibility they have — that we all have — to build and safeguard a future that would make Aaron proud, and honour the ideals and dedication that burnt so brightly within him by

embodying them in thought and word and action."

The MIT statement said the outage lasted for three hours before IS&T added filters to block the attack.

Five days later, the MIT e-mail service was attacked. The hack lasted from four to six hours, before IS&T staff were able to stop the attack.

Those who visited the university's web domain between 11:58 a.m. and 1:05 p.m. saw a page which said, "R.I.P. Aaron Swartz, Hacked by grand wizard of Lulzsec, Sabu."

Then on Jan. 28, MIT e-mails were delayed or lost, and the MIT website and other online services were inaccessible from off campus. The attack was on the MIT domain name, "mit.edu".

"IS&T is working to identify and address other vulnerabilities that present a risk to the campus network and key services — although the nature of these complex systems makes it difficult to eliminate risk completely," Fitzgerald said in the statement. "Community members should be assured that particular attention is being paid to minimizing risks and outages in the future."

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